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## SCHLEITER'S 'RELIGION AND CULTURE'<sup>1</sup>

THE book contains, as the sub-title suggests, a philosophico-psychological analysis and critique of the methods employed in the study of the genesis and development of the spiritual nature of man, or of what the Germans not inaptly call the *Geisteswissenschaften*, as ethnology, folk-lore, and particularly the religious phenomena. The author points out, one after the other, the pitfalls and difficulties which beset the workers in these fields who attempt to establish comprehensive generalizations and classifications and formulate valid universal conclusions, to which they frequently succumb, and the reason and causes thereof. The investigator who devotes intensive study to a limited geographical area or historical period and undertakes to formulate universal laws upon the group of cultural facts observed therein as if they were isolated and independent, neglects the important factor of the transmission and intermixture of cultural elements from one area to another. Besides, the specific people under consideration may not be in a primitive *status quo*, but rather represent a process of degeneration from a higher level of culture.

The comparative method often classifies the facts gathered from the four corners of the earth and the ends of time in a loose and superficial manner, taking as its *fundamentum comparationis* a merely external, morphological criterion, and thence 'bunching facts without reference to their cultural settings and the penumbræ of thoughts and feelings which cluster round them'. Such terms as animism, fetishism, taboo, and so on, designate phenomena of most varied historical origin and psychological and affective motivation. For instance, a certain animal is taboo because it

<sup>1</sup> *Religion and Culture*. A critical survey of methods of approach to religious phenomena. By FREDERICK SCHLEITER, Ph.D. New York: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1919. pp. x + 206.

is considered sacred ; because it is believed to be the incarnation of an ancestor ; because it is a totem ; because it is unclean, &c. The author does not disparage the comparative method, but pleads for a more adequate sifting, testing, and re-analysing of the phenomena marshalled for comparison in accordance with more critical principles, and abandonment of the exclusive use of the form criterion as basis of classification of similarities. In general, the religious phenomena should not be described and characterized in the abstract as isolated facts lifted out of their indigenous habitats, but their genetic history and cultural and psychological setting taken into account.

These few remarks may convey an idea of tone and tenor of the book, but hardly suggest the richness of its contents. All the theories and attempts to get at the *primordium* of the spiritual life of man and to determine the stages of its evolution, from *mana* to monotheism, are here in a keen and profound manner analysed and dissected, weighed and, on the whole, found wanting.

The absence of an index in a book teeming with so many interesting and important items is regrettable. The book is heartily recommended to all interested in the study of man.

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